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U.S. War dept.

INDIANS HOSTILE ON WESTERN FRONTIER.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

UPON THE SUBJECT OF A

Hostile disposition upon the part of the Indians on the Western Frontier.

JUNE 18, 1838.

Read, and laid upon the table.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR,

June 16, 1838.

SIR: In reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 12th instant, I have the honor to transmit herewith a report from the Adjutant General of the army, accompanied by copies of letters of Brigadier General Arbuckle and Lieutenant Colonel Vose, on the subject of a hostile disposition on the part of the Indians upon the Western frontier. A subsequent letter from the former, dated May 16, 1838, has been received by the Adjutant General, in which he informs the Department that a portion of the Delawares, Quapaws, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, have manifested, in council, a disposition to resort to acts of hostility against the United States; that no positive agreement to go to war had been determined on, but that the question would probably be decided at their next meeting. He regrets that, should war take place, we are not in a condition to resist it, in consequence of a deficiency of force of any kind, and of the necessary fortified places and supplies; but adds that, although the prospects on the frontier are rather gloomy at present, he hopes peace will be continued. The letter itself is not communicated, because General Arbuckle desires that it may not be made public, and I think its publicity might prove prejudicial to the public interests. But if, notwithstanding the wishes of the general and the opinion of the Department, the House desire a copy of it, one will be immediately communicated.

I likewise enclose a communication from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which is accompanied by copies and extracts from documents received by him on the same subject.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. R. POINSETT.

HON. JAMES K. POLK,
Speaker of the House of Reps.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, .

Washington, June 15, 1838.

SIR: In answer to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 12th instant, directing "copies of all communications from General Arbuckle, during the last twelve months, in relation to the probability of an Indian war upon the Western frontier, with such other information as may be in possession of the War Department touching that subject," to be furnished, I respectfully submit herewith papers marked A, B, C, and D.

It may be proper respectfully to remark, that many communications have been received from commanding generals and other officers on the frontiers, on the subject of occasional Indian disturbances and depredations, and the measures promptly adopted at the time to tranquillize and give security to the border inhabitants; but as these communications, which are voluminous, do not seem to advert to "the probability of an Indian war," it is not supposed that they are embraced in the terms or requirements of the resolution.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

R. JONES, *Adjutant Gen.*

HON. J. R. POINSETT,
Secretary of War.

A.

HEADQUARTERS, 2D DEPARTMENT, WESTERN DIVISION,

Fort Gibson, April 26, 1838.

SIR: I have the honor herewith to enclose copies of communications from the commanding officer of Fort Towson, under date of the 12th instant, by which it will be perceived that a disturbance has taken place on the south side of Red river, between the inhabitants and the Choctaw Indians, at a point over which both Texas and the United States claim jurisdiction.

This circumstance will, it is believed, furnish sufficient evidence, that, to ensure peace and good order on the Red-river frontier, it is necessary that the United States should possess, at least, all the country as far south as the Sabine river to its source, and as far west as where our frontier boundary-line leaves Red river.

It is requested that the Government will decide what shall be done with the two Choctaws now in confinement at Fort Towson, charged with having caused the unfortunate affray referred to in Lieutenant Colonel Vose's communication.

I fully concur in the opinion expressed by Colonel Vose, of the necessity of the military force on Red river being increased at an early period.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

M. ARBUCKLE,

Brevet Brig. Gen. commanding.

To Brig. Gen. R. JONES,

Adjutant General, Washington city.

B.

HEADQUARTERS 3D INFANTRY,

Fort Towson, April 12, 1838.

SIR: Since my communication of this morning,* relative to the affray on the Red river, I have been informed by one of the agents for subsisting the Chickasaws at the Blue, that there is a good deal of difficulty among the Chickasaws, Choctaws, and some Delawares living there, and that he was afraid something serious would take place. I have written to them, and have recommended their remaining quiet until the return of Captain Armstrong, who, I presume, will see that there is a proper understanding among them.

I think the time has now arrived when there should be an augmentation of the force upon this frontier, and I take the liberty to recommend that the whole of the 3d infantry be concentrated at this post, with as little delay as practicable.

The population bordering on the Red river, and directly opposite the Choctaws, has greatly increased during the last year, and is still increasing. Difficulties are frequently taking place between the whites and Choctaws, and, unless there is an imposing military force on this frontier, I fear we may have disasters of a serious nature.

Captain Bonneville will return to Fort Towson to-morrow, and will set off for Fort Gibson as soon as the transportation is ready for him.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. H. VOSE,

Lieut. Col. 3d Infantry, commanding.

Brig. Gen. M. ARBUCKLE,

Commanding 2d Dept., Western Division, Fort Gibson.

C.

HEADQUARTERS THIRD INFANTRY,

Fort Towson, April 13, 1838.

SIR: An affray between the white people and Choctaws has recently taken place on the south side of Red river, and about 10 miles west of the Kiamichi, in which a white man and a Choctaw were killed, two white men and one woman and child wounded. The white people were undoubtedly the aggressors, as is generally the case in all Indian difficulties. But, in order to allay the great excitement among the white people, I have prevailed upon the Choctaws to give up two of the ringleaders in the affray, and they are now confined at the fort. I have given General Arbuckle the particulars of the affair, and requested instructions from him relative to the disposition of the prisoners, and, in case he should not feel at liberty to give me such instructions, to refer the subject to higher authority. The population in that part of Arkansas near Fort Towson has increased very much during the last year, and continues to increase; most of the people have thrown off their allegiance to Arkansas, and de-

* For the substance of this letter, see the following one, dated April 13, to the Adjutant General.

clare themselves under the Texian Government. Frequent collisions are taking place between the white people and the Choctaws, the Choctaws being thickly settled on one side of the Red river, and the white people on the other side, with a number of stores, where liquor is kept in large quantities.

Some difficulties have already occurred among a part of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Delawares, who reside on the Blue river in the Upper Choctaw district.

Under these circumstances, I feel it my duty to recommend an immediate augmentation of the military force on this frontier. The whole of the third infantry will not, in my opinion, be a larger force than is required to preserve the peace and tranquillity of this part of the country.

We have no more quarters at this post than are required for the troops now here; but temporary cabins could be put up in a very short time, and which would answer every purpose until the erection of the permanent work which is contemplated for this frontier.

I consider this command too small to justify any detachment from it.

I beg leave to add that I have repeatedly urged the appointment of a sub-agent for the Choctaws to reside in this part of the nation. It is impossible for Captain Armstrong, while he is superintendent for other tribes, and residing so far from the great body of the Choctaws, to give that attention to their affairs which is absolutely required. The Indians require an agent constantly with them.

I hope my remarks in this letter will not be thought intrusive. I have felt it my duty to make them.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. H. VOSE,

Lieutenant Colonel Third Infantry, Commanding.

Brigadier General R. JONES,

Adjutant General, Washington.

D.

HEADQUARTERS, 1ST DEPT. WEST DIVISION OF THE ARMY,

Jefferson Barracks, 2d May, 1838.

SIR: I have the honor to report, for the information of the General-in-chief and the honorable Secretary of War, that I returned to this post from the frontier the day before yesterday. My letter of the 23d ultimo, addressed to you from Fort Leavenworth, accompanied by Col. Kearney's reports, contains all the information in reference to the operations of our troops in the Osage country, and our present relations with them.

I have deemed it advisable to keep a detachment of troops during the ensuing summer upon our Osage border, and the commanding officer at Fort Leavenworth has been accordingly instructed to detach a company of dragoons to that point, to range upon the line between the white settlements and the Osage Indians; the company to be relieved occasionally by another detail from the same post for the object.

Colonel Kearney and Captain Boon returned from the neighborhood of Council Bluffs to Fort Leavenworth on the 24th ultimo, after having ex-

amined the country above and below the Platte, and fixed upon a site for a military post. I shall receive their report in a day or two, when it will be forwarded to you.

One of the pilots of the steamboat *Pirate*, whilst on a voyage up the Missouri, some ten days ago, discovered a painted pole and part of a white person's scalp planted on the point of a low prairie bluff opposite Nishnebottona. The ground around the pole had been much beaten up by Indians dancing—I presume the scalp-dance, or rather the war-dance.

I rather think the scalp party belonged to the Sacs of the Missouri, and that they had met the Ottoes, who joined them in the dance.

The Indians on the frontier are generally dissatisfied, but there is probably no immediate outbreak to be apprehended.

I enclose herewith the piece of scalp and part of the pole alluded to above.

With great respect, sir, your most obedient servant,

H. ATKINSON,

Brigadier General U. S. Army.

Brigadier General R. JONES,

Adjutant General U. S. Army, Washington.

WAR DEPARTMENT,

Office Indian Affairs, June 16, 1838.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit copies of and extracts from letters on file in this office, in reference to an increase of the military force on the Western and Northwestern frontier, as called for by the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 12th inst.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

C. A. HARRIS,

Commissioner.

Hon. J. R. POINSETT,

Secretary of War.

Extract from a letter of General Arbuckle, dated Fort Gibson, January 3, 1837, to Brigadier General R. Jones.

“I am not inclined to believe that the reports of the Choctaw hunters are true, and I shall not be surprised if many reports of the same character are received from that quarter in consequence of the greater portion of the troops having been withdrawn from it. Yet as there is a possibility of the prairie Indians having an intention of going to war against the United States, I shall take immediate measures to gain the best information I can in relation to this matter. I am not informed of any Indian tribe west of this called Cachies; perhaps it was the Kitsoss band of the Wichitaws that the Choctaws received reports from. I am decidedly of the opinion that the companies under the command of Col. Vose, as well as the 3d and 7th infantry, should be completed by recruits as soon as possible.”

Extracts from a letter of Governor H. Dodge, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Wisconsin, dated Belmont, February 15th, 1837, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

"From the enclosed communication from General Street, you will see that a number of the Pottawatamies are wintering west of the Mississippi, and, with the Winnebagoes, are killing the stock of the inhabitants. The Pottawatamies have no right to remain in this Territory under any existing treaty between them and the United States. It is reported they intend uniting with the Sac and Fox Indians in making an attack on the Sioux in the spring. In a former letter I had the honor to address you, I suggested the propriety of locating three companies of dragoons on this frontier. I am strengthened, from present appearances, in again calling the attention of your Department to this important measure. The dragoons should be posted in advance of the settlements, to range the country the whole extent of the frontier, to enable them to watch the movements of the Indians. It would have a most salutary effect if the dragoons would arrest the Indian murderers and bring them to justice when they kill each other. It would prove to them the power and efficiency of the Government, and would redeem the pledge so often made that the guilty should be punished and peace preserved between the different nations of Indians who are under their protection."

"For the peace of this frontier I think it a subject of vital importance to the people of this Territory that a mounted force should be ready to range the country bordering on the frontiers of this Territory as early as the grass will sustain the dragoon horses."

FORT LEAVENWORTH, *March 2, 1837.*

SIR: I received a letter last night from Mr. Joseph Robidoux, a trader at the Blacksnake hills, informing me that a man by the name of Bibe, a half-breed in the employ of Mr. B. Roy, was killed a short time since by an Ottoe Indian in a drunken frolic; and that about the same time, but at a different place, a Frenchman, brother-in-law to Mr. Roy, by the name of Francois Tayon, had his nose bitten off by an Iowa Indian, also in a drunken frolic. Mr. R. states that the Missouri Sacs are very much dissatisfied, and attributes the cause of their dissatisfaction to one of their braves, the *Fork*, who is now in Washington city. Mr. R. writes me that a band of about thirty lodges of Ottoes are encamped with the Iowas, without any thing to eat whatever, but find plenty of whiskey to drink. Mr. R.'s son, who was the bearer of his father's letter, informs me that just before he left home an Ottoe Indian was brought in from the Iowa village almost lifeless from a stab he had received from an Iowa; he thinks the Ottoe cannot live more than a day or two. He further states, that the Indians have very recently killed a number of cattle that had been driven by the whites into the Missouri bottoms, above the Blacksnake hills.

A few days ago, Mr. Davis, sub-agent, attempted to arrest a bottle of whiskey from a Pottawatamie: the Indian drew a knife and made at Mr. D., and, but for the timely interference of a Mr. Holt, who felled the Indian to the ground the first blow with a club, it is probable that Mr.

D. would have been killed ; the Indian was considerably injured, and was taken off by his friend, another Pottawatamie.

A few days after this last-mentioned occurrence, I was over at Caldwell's, the Pottawatamie chief ; he was duly sober, though I saw a considerable number of both men and squaws who were not. I had been in the house but a few minutes when an Indian rushed in to inform Caldwell that a squaw had just been stabbed to death by an Indian. The squaw was going from one wigwam to another with a bottle of whiskey in her hand ; the Indian met and took the bottle from her ; she told him that if her brother were present he would not dare to treat her in that way ; he instantly drew from his belt a long knife, with which, demon like, he stabbed her four times, twice in the back and twice in the breast : she fell dead in her tracks.

I am thus particular, and have taken the liberty of reporting facts connected with tribes not belonging to my own agency, for the purpose of convincing you, if you ever entertained any doubts on the subject, that unless more United States troops are speedily located on our Northern and Western frontiers, with power, under the most rigid orders, to clear the country of spirituous liquors, a short time will suffice to bring about a much more lamentable state of things in this quarter than has yet been witnessed in the South. From Caldwell I learn that Keokuck, the Sac chief on the Mississippi, has sent word to the Iowas and Missouri Sacs that he has asked permission of the department to fight the Sioux two years in his own way. I learn, also, from the same source, that the Chippewa Indians have sent word that they would be much pleased if the Pottawatamies would establish themselves on the Des Moines, near the Racoon fork ; that Keokuck would soon locate a town for himself and his tribe in the same neighborhood ; that then the Chippewas could visit their friends in canoes down the Mississippi and up the Des Moines rivers. If there is any truth in these reports concerning Keokuck, it is probable that he is endeavoring to get up a strong party to join him in the spring against the Sioux.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your most obedient servant,
JNO. DOUGHERTY,
Indian Agent.

Gen. WM. CLARK,
Superintendent Indian Affairs.

Extract of a letter from John Dougherty to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated

FORT LEAVENWORTH, June 27, 1837.

I have no doubt also that a visit of this kind would have a good effect in deterring the wild Indian from joining the dissatisfied, tame, or emigrant tribes against the frontier settlements, of which I can honestly assure you there is much more danger than you, living at so great a distance, and without an opportunity of mingling with them, could imagine ; and I now give it as my decided opinion, that unless the contemplated cordon of military posts be established in the course of twelve or eighteen months, our frontier, from Red river to the lakes, will be one scene of

bloodshed. Far be it from me to give alarm when there is no occasion; but such is my opinion, and I feel bound, as an agent of the Government, to give it freely.

Extract of a letter from Henry R. Schoolcraft to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated

SUPERINTENDENCY INDIAN AFFAIRS,

Michilimackinac, August 29, 1837.

I have the honor to enclose, for the information of the Department, an extract of a letter from a gentleman of intelligence at St. Mary's, respecting a spirit of disaffection towards the United States, disclosed at the recent annual assemblage of the Indians at Manatoulin island, in Upper Canada. Assemblages of this kind are convened by the officers of the British Indian department, and comprise a considerable number of the Northwest tribes, who retain their ancient predilections for the English. The practice is of long standing, and has for its object the distribution of presents to the tribes who aided them in the late war against the United States. The assemblage referred to in the extract is not, therefore, unusual, but it has been attended the present season by an increased number of our Indians, including the band of Pottawatamies who were mentioned in my letter of the 10th July last, together with the entire band of Sault Ste. Marie, with very few exceptions.

While the transaction alluded to is not calculated to excite alarm, yet it brings to mind the necessity of vigilance on the part of the Department in watching the international arrangements of a people, portions of whom are in an unsettled state, and all of whom have taught us by their history that they are prone to attempt the accomplishment of things which a civilized nation would pronounce preposterous.

Should Congress increase the numerical strength of the army, policy clearly requires that our exterior frontier lake posts should be kept up. The occupancy of Drummond island, in lake Huron, would place a force at the point where the Western and Northwestern tribes pass into the Canadas, and the annual visits, which are prejudicial to the Indians, might thus be broken up.

Extract from the communication referred to in the preceding letter.

In our treaty with our great father the President, he promised to erect a military post near our boundary, for the protection of our women and children, if we desired it. We now say to you we wish that part of the promise carried into effect; not that we are afraid of any nation, but we are near several tribes of Indians who have suffered greatly by the small-pox last season, and they annoy us very much in many ways; these are the Ottoes; they are travelling all through our country and claim it as their own; and whenever they see one of our people, either man, woman, or child, they make some assault upon them, and threaten to kill them. They have commenced killing our stock, and next thing

is stealing of our horses. This is certain to bring on trouble, and, therefore, we wish the military post established, and troops stationed at it, for the purpose of keeping those people on their own side of the river. We want no difficulties with them, and when this is done we will not trespass on them; our wish is to be friendly, and when we visit we don't want a theft to be committed on parting by our neighbors, as we will not commit any on them. Such is the wish of our nation.

Extract of a letter from John Dougherty to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated

FORT LEAVENWORTH, March 19, 1838.

I would here beg leave to impress upon your mind the immediate necessity of increasing the army with a view to the protection of the frontiers previous to a general outbreaking of the Indians, which, once commenced, God alone knows where it will end. Owing to continued bad weather, I did not reach home until the 1st instant.

Extract of a letter from Colonel J. H. Vose to the Adjutant General of the United States army, dated

FORT TOWSON, April 13, 1838.

Frequent collisions are taking place between the white people and the Choctaws; the Choctaws being thickly settled on one side of the Red river, and the white people on the other side, with a number of stores, where liquor is kept in large quantities.

Some difficulties have already occurred among a party of Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Delawares, who reside on the Blue river, in the upper Choctaw district.

Under these circumstances, I feel it my duty to recommend an immediate augmentation of the military force on this frontier. The whole of the 3d infantry will not, in my opinion, be a larger force than is required to preserve the peace and tranquillity of this part of the country.

We have no more quarters at this post than are required for the troops now here; but temporary cabins could be put up in a very short time, and which would answer every purpose until the erection of the permanent work which is contemplated for this frontier.

I consider this command too small to justify any detachment from it.

Extract of a letter from H. H. Sibley to his excellency Henry Dodge, dated

RIVER ST. PETER'S, April 23, 1838.

The upper Sioux generally have committed many outrages; in fact, it is no longer considered safe to remain among them; consequently, I have been obliged to order the abandonment of the post at Lac Travers, which has hitherto been one of our most important stations. Mr. Brown, the

gentleman hitherto in charge of that post, was fired at and wounded in the shoulder by an Indian residing in the vicinity, and that while inside of the fort. Besides this, many of our horses and cattle have been killed or driven off, and the lives of our people threatened. I had the honor to represent to your excellency, in person, last season, the necessity that existed that the Lac Travers section of country should be traversed by an imposing force of mounted men; for the Indians now laugh to scorn our threats that the arm of their great father would be extended to punish them in case they continued their outrageous conduct towards the whites.





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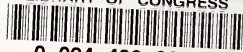
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